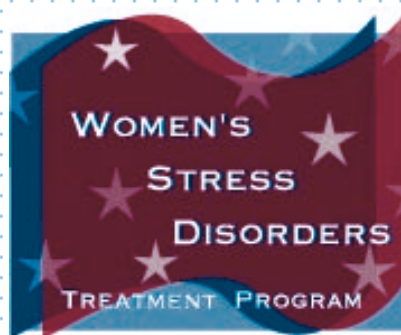


Improving Sleep

Some strategies
for better sleep



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Factors affecting your sleep

- ◆ Exercise
- ◆ Your sleep environment
- ◆ Your pre-sleep and bedroom rituals
- ◆ The safety of your environment
- ◆ Alcohol, prescribed medications, nicotine, caffeine, and other drug use
- ◆ Health conditions or chronic pain
- ◆ Your attitudes and beliefs



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Exercise

- Regular exercise helps you fall asleep more quickly and sleep more deeply.
- However, avoid exercising near bedtime.



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Your sleep environment

- If an uncomfortable bed or bedding is part of the problem, change it.
- Find a comfortable sleeping temperature for your bedroom (not too hot or too cold).
- Block out distracting noises and as much light as possible.



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More about your sleep environment

- Turn the clock face away from you and replace a ticking clock with a silent one.
- Sharing a bed is sometimes a problem. You may need to sleep alone.



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Pre-sleep and bedroom rituals

- ◆ Create a pre-sleep ritual, such as a warm bath or practicing deep relaxation before bed. Allow time to wind down.
- ◆ Warm milk or other foods high in tryptophan sometimes help people sleep.
- ◆ Get into your favorite sleeping position.



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Let bedtime rituals work for you

- ◆ Give yourself some time to slow down and relax before bed.
- ◆ Take a hot bath or listen to a relaxation tape before bedtime.
- ◆ Teach your body to associate your bed with sleep by only using it for sleep and sex (do not read or watch television in bed).



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The safety of your environment

If you live in a place that is unsafe, you may feel too anxious to sleep. If this is the case, you may want your first step to be taking actions to improve your safety, such as installing window locks or an alarm system.



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Alcohol and stimulants (nicotine, caffeine)

- Limit use of these, particularly near bedtime.
- If you use these substances a lot your body can become dependent upon them so you may wake up when the effects of your last “dose” wears off.



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Alcohol

- ◆ Alcohol use is associated with disturbed, restless sleep.
- ◆ In some people alcohol is known to trigger sleep apnea.
- ◆ While some people report that it helps them fall asleep, people who use alcohol have poorer quality sleep with more awakenings.



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Nicotine

- ◆ Nicotine is a stimulant.
- ◆ Insomnia is one of the main things smokers complain about.
- ◆ Smoking raises blood pressure, speeds up the heart rate and stimulates brain wave activity, all of which makes it harder to sleep.



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Caffeine

- ◆ Insomniacs have higher metabolisms than normal.
- ◆ They also eliminate caffeine from their body more slowly.
- ◆ As you get older you become more sensitive to caffeine.



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Prescribed drugs

Many medications can cause sleeplessness as a side effect. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about this possibility.



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Medical factors

- ◆ Sometimes physical issues (pain, hot flashes, heartburn) interrupt sleep.
- ◆ Discuss ways to address these with your medical provider.



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Chronic pain

When pain is a factor in your sleep difficulties, pay particular attention to the comfort of your bed, when you take pain medications, your body position in bed, and reducing or better managing stress in your life.



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Beliefs that get in the way of better sleep

- ◆ Worrying that you will have a nervous breakdown if you don't sleep.
- ◆ Believing that people need to cut you some slack because you haven't slept well.
- ◆ Pride about being able to function with so little sleep.



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Helpful habits

- For several hours before bedtime avoid caffeine, spicy foods, alcohol and tobacco.
- Exercise regularly, though not right before sleep.
- Limit fluid intake right before bedtime.
- Stick with a sleep schedule. Go to sleep and get up at the same times every day, regardless of how much sleep you got the night before.



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If you still can't sleep

- ➔ If you don't fall asleep within 15 to 30 minutes, get up, go to another room and read a calming book or watch a calming television program until you can barely stay awake.
- ➔ Try to stay awake as long as possible.
- ➔ You may have to do this several times a night at first.



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Set up your own experiments

- ◆ We suggest the above ideas because they seem to be most helpful for most people. However, pay attention to what works for *you*.
- ◆ Give your experiments a few weeks before deciding whether they help or not. One night, or even a few nights is not a long enough trial.



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Use a sleep log to keep track of what works and what doesn't

- ◆ List the various factors that you think might be influencing your sleep (e.g., stress, diet, naps, medications).
- ◆ Record information about your sleep each night (e.g., how long it took to fall asleep, how many times you woke up, for how long, how rested you felt in the morning).



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Record this for a few weeks

- Sometimes the factors that worsen your sleep occur in a regular pattern over a long time period. Unless you keep track for a few weeks you may not know this.
- For example, menstrual cycles, work deadlines, or financial pressure may create problems regularly, but not every day.



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***Make a new hypothesis
and test it using
this information***

If, for example, you find that you don't sleep well after you eat pizza, try cutting out pizza and see what happens. It may be the pizza, or it could be that you eat pizza after stressful events and it's actually the stress that creates sleep problems.



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“Sleep hygiene”

- ◆ Like other hygiene activities, such as bathing or brushing your teeth, good sleep requires engaging regularly in good practices.
- ◆ While none of these practices may work 100% of the time, when you piece them together, 10% here and 20% there, your sleep can improve.



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